

YOUTH MOVING INTO ADULTHOOD WITH 4-H RITE OF PASSAGE

King County 4-H facilitated the first 4-H Rite of Passage (ROP) program for youth this year. Participants were from the Metro King County Youth-Build Program. This program is a national drop-out retrieval program, designed to promote positive life skills, workforce preparation, and specifically, construction skills leading to a guaranteed job at the end of a successful year in the program. The youth participants were ages 17-19.

The group of 6 was evenly divided between males and females. These youth had experienced many family and school challenges, some were former drug and alcohol abusers, some were parents, some were living on the



street. All were committed to achieving success in their life, but none was fully convinced of the value of ROP at the time of our first meeting.

Recruiting youth was a challenge. Students wondered why they would want to go without the comforts of home. Why they would choose to fast for 3 days. In order to interest them, the YouthBuild staff members who had participated in their own Rite of Passage last August, shared their stories. Little by little, over several weeks, a few youth came forward and expressed interest in learning more.

A life-changing event...

During our wilderness stay, youth continued to work on setting their intentions. Most of them focused on moving to adulthood. But, as their time to solo drew closer, predictable fears took over and the participants decided in the end that it was too big a risk for them to sleep alone in the wilderness. Instead, we agreed to come home early. Even so, the student reflections made it clear that this experience will change their lives for the better. One stu-

dent described her experience this way: "The wind. You never know what it will throw." Another student carved an arrow. The arrow was tipped with red like the fire of his passion for success in life. It had stripes of color representing his family and friends. The curve of the arrow represented to him that his life had not been a straight path and would probably take unpredictable turns.



On June 13 we left for Ellensburg from Seattle with 4 wide-eyed and excited YouthBuild students. We met up with our 4-H Rite of Passage Trainers at the end of the road outside Kittitas.

Photo S. Lerner



We prepared for the wilderness trip in Lincoln Park. Students learned about the 4 Shields, the principles used by native cultures throughout the world to understand human nature and its relationship to nature. Youth also learned wilderness survival skill such as using a compass and making shelter.

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